

Message Text

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61

ACTION ARA-17

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 OPR-02 SY-07 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-09 H-02

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-15

USIA-12 AID-20 PC-04 EB-11 SIL-01 LAB-06 COME-00

OMB-01 RSR-01 /137 W

----- 044927

R 112025 Z APR 73

FM AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1610

TO RUEHCR/ AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN 593

AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE KINGSTON 1155

E. O. 11652: N/ A

TAGS: PINS JM

SUBJ: SPATE OF FIRES HITS KINGSTON

1. SUMMARY. FOR TWO WEEK KINGSTON HAS BEEN PLAGUED BY A SERIES OF FIRES IN ITS COMMERCIAL AND WAREHOUSE AREAS. FIRES HAVE BEEN LARGELY CONFINED TO THE SEEDIER SECTIONS MS WESTERN KINGSTON, BUT SEVERAL HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN THE CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT. CHARGES OF ARSON AND POLITICAL MOTIVATION HAVE BEEN CIRCULATING. PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE REQUIRED OF EMBASSY AS TO SOURCE. MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS AND CITY COUNCIL HAVE VOWED ALL OUT POLICE AND MILITARY EFFORT TO PREVENT CONTINUED OUTBREAK. END SUMMARY.

2. CURRENT EPISODE OF " FIREDEMIC" BEGAN WITH \$200,000 WAREHOUSE FIRE ON MORNING OF MARCH 29, AND HAS CONTINUED WITH MORE THAN A DOZEN THUS FAR. TOTAL DAMAGES HAVE BEEN ESTIMATED AS IN THE VICINITY OF \$1,000,000. MOST OF THE FIRES HAVE TAKEN PLACE AT GARMENT MANUFACTURING AND WHOLESALE CONCERNS WITH
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SEVERAL AT LUMBER YARDS, MANY OF WHICH ARE OWNED BY MERCHANTS OF LEBANESE AND CHINESE ORIGIN. THE FIRES HAVE BEEN ACCOMPANIED BY GANGS OF LOOTERS WHO HAVE OBSTRUCTED POLICE AND FIRE BRIGADE EFFORTS.

3. THE POLICE AND FIRE BRIGADE OFFICIALS HAVE BLAMED MANY OF THE FIRES ON ARSONISTS. THE MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS ON APRIL 2 ATTRIBUTED THE FIRES TO THE ENDING OF THE NATIONAL LOTTERY WHICH HAS THROWN MANY PEOPLE ONTO THE UNEMPLOYMENT ROLLS. SOME POLITICAL LEADERS, MOST NOTABLY THE SENATOR AND FORMER MAYOR OF KINGSTON, ELI MATALON, HAVE ATTEMPTED TO INJECT A POLITICAL MOTIVE INTO THE FIRES, CLAIMING AT AN APRIL 10 MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL THE FIREDEMIC IS AN ATTEMPT BY THE OPPOSITION TO ATTACK THE GOVERNMENT, AS ORTHODOX METHODS HAVE PROVEN FUTILE. THE MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS HAS GIVEN INSTRUCTIONS TO THE POLICE TO BE AS FIRM AND RIGID AS POSSIBLE IN DEALING WITH LOOTERS. THE POLICE AND DEFENSE FORCE HAVE REINFORCED THEIR PATROLS IN THE AFFECTED AREAS.

4. THE OPPOSITION JAMAICA LABOR PARTY AND ITS AFFILIATED TRADE UNION, THE BITU, ISSUED STATEMENTS ON APRIL 10, CLAIMING THAT THEY HAD BOTH RECEIVED THREATS TO THE EFFECT THAT THEIR PREMISES WOULD BE HIT SHORTLY. BOTH DENIED HAVING ANYTHING TO DO WITH THE ORIGINS OF THE FIRES.

5. ALTHOUGH CHARGES AND COUNTER- CHARGES ARE SAILING AROUND KINGSTON, THE GOVERNMENT DOESN' T SEEM TO HAVE A FIRM HANDLE ON THE SOURCE OF THE FIRES. AN ADVISOR TO THE PRIME MINISTER EVEN CALLED THE CHARGE ON MONDAY TO ASK IF THE EMBASSY HAD ANY INFORMATION AS TO THE CAUSE OF THE FIRES.

6. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH THE POLITICAL DEBATE WILL PROBABLY BECOME INTENSIFIED IN THE NEXT SEVERAL DAYS, THE EMBASSY DOUBTS THAT EITHER OF THE TWO MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES ARE INVOLVED IN ANY SIGNIFICANT WAY. IT IS MORE LIKELY THAT CAUSES OF THE ARSON AND LOOTING LIE MORE IN THE DIFFICULT SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF KINGSTON, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PARTICULARLY ITS WESTERN SECTIONS, COMPOUNDED

BY UNEMPLOYMENT, RAPIDLY RISING CONSUMER PRICES
AND GOODS SHORTAGES. SMALL DISSIDENT GROUPS AND PROTECTION
RACKETEERS MAY ALSO BE INVOLVED. SOME OF THE BLAZES MIGHT
ALSO BE DELIBERATE ATTEMPTS BY PROPRIETORS TO COLLECT
INSURANCE OR ESTABLISH TAX LOSSES BEFORE THE END OF
THE JAMAICAN TAX YEAR- A NOT UNCOMMON PRACTICE IN
THE HISTORY OF KINGSTON.
ROBERTS

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*** Current Handling Restrictions *** n/a

*** Current Classification *** LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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GEORGETOWN
PORT OF SPAIN
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